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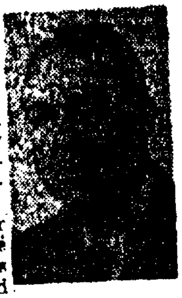
Osmers Sees Anti-Missile Missile as Key to Major War

By Edward J. Rearden
Herald-News Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — There will be no major war until an aggressor nation has an operational anti-missile missile.



Rearden

That is the considered opinion of Representative Frank C. Osmers, Jr., New Jersey's 9th District congressman.

As a member of the House armed services committee and its space committee, the Bergen Republican is as close to the country's military and space program problems as any legislator on Capitol Hill. Serving with these two important groups, Osmers has heard them discussed both at open hearings and in closed-door sessions by our top military and Defense Department chiefs as well as our leading scientists and rocket experts.

Here is Osmers' thinking on the subject.

No nation will be foolish enough to launch a nuclear attack unless it is reasonably certain it cannot itself be wiped off the face of the earth by a retaliatory nuclear assault by its intended victim.

As late as the last world war, one bomber, one tank or one [illegible]-carrying infantryman could [illegible] the defense lines without [illegible] undue alarm. But so [illegible] has the art of warmaking [illegible] over the past few years [illegible] a single nuclear bomb [illegible] plane or missile gets through and an entire city disappears from the map.

THE risk is too great to chance, says Osmers. An operational anti-missile missile which will eliminate that risk is the only answer.

But consider the tremendous task involved in perfecting such an anti-missile system. An intercontinental ballistic missile is only a yard wide. It travels at a speed of 18,000 miles an hour. At that speed, an effective anti-missile missile system must have the capability to detect it almost when it is launched. But a crafty enemy will likely launch a number of "dummy" missiles along with its nuclear warhead carrying ICBM in order to confuse its intended victim.

Yet the "real" missile must be intercepted and destroyed while it is at least 100 miles from the ground to minimize the danger of radioactive fallout. That means the anti-missile missile will have about one second to fire and make its hit, Osmers points out.

A rather discouraging outlook, considering our rocket experts admit we have no anti-missile missile system at present, and no early prospects for one. The Nike-Zeus and the Bomarc B are this country's [illegible] hopes in this field, but the Bomarc has failed in its last six firings, leaving its future in doubt. And the Nike-Zeus is only approaching the testing stage.

OSMERS is among those who agree with Defense Secretary Thomas Gates, Jr., when he says we are getting better information out of Russia these days concerning its missile strength. He has heard Allen Dulles, our Central Intelligence Agency chief, echo that claim.

The reason is, they say, that there has been an opening up since Nikita Khrushchev succeeded Joe Stalin [illegible] had man[illegible] in Russia. Exch[illegible] visits of students, scientists and officials have been responsible in a large measure. This has enabled us to make more accurate estimates of Soviet capabilities. While the late and unlamented Stalin was keeping the iron curtain closely closed, CIA's jobs was infinitely more difficult.

"Have you any doubt that Russia has had its share of missile firing failures, too?" asks Osmers. "The only difference was that you never heard about them. We told the world about our failures [illegible] a [illegible] psychological [illegible] upon our people and those of other nations."

Oddly enough, says the Bergen congressman, it was a major break-through by American scientists which is largely responsible for our present dilemma.

They were first to find a way to substantially reduce the size of nuclear warheads. This discovery led to the Pentagon decision that it was more practical to carry the warheads in bomber planes and to develop a missile with a medium thrust.

WHY develop an engine with a million pound thrust, our military experts reasoned, when one with a 200,000-pound thrust was capable fo doing the job?

The Russians, unable to match us in reducing the size and weight of their nuclear warheads, were forced to create rocket engines with a vastly more powerful thrust to carry the heavier payload.

That is why, when the space race began, they were able to hurl greater payloads farther and with greater accuracy than we. That is the reason for their exciting successes with their Sputniks, their moon-hitting missile and their other projects in space.

Militarily, our medium thrust engines are as efficient — could even be more accurate—as theirs. As Secretary Gates testified before the space committee recently—we have an ICBM capable of going 5,500 miles or more. But you don't have to fire one that far to hit any target on earth.

But we must still develop an engine with a thrust sufficient to match the Soviet feat of hitting the moon. And no matter how you try to work it out, research and development work on a project like that takes from three to five years.

WE have Saturn in the works now, Dr. Wernher von Braun told the committee the other day. But there are certain stages it must go through, he explained, and no amount of additional funds can cut down the research and development time appreciably.

Meantime, he said, Russia probably has another rocket under development larger than any they have yet fired.

German-born von Braun, now a United States citizen and our top rocket expert, was asked why this country is so far behind the Soviets in missile development.

"Maybe," he said, "we waited too long".